

File # 266
Chapter IV. THE BA'TH--IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE *

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I. The Background

Ideology has been defined as "visionary theorizing" or "the manner or content of thinking characteristic of an individual or class." Ideologies vary from area to area in relevance to social conditions and social values. Ba'thist ideology is relative to a specific area, the Arab world, and to the present time. It contains some elements of both definitions given above; it is a fusion of socialism with Arab nationalism, which gives it a strong appeal to the new élite in the Arab world. This is a class which largely rejects such ideologies as Western democracy, traditional Islam, and Marxist Communism, stating that they are not applicable to the problems it faces. It charges that none of these can adequately solve the Arabs' economic and social problems: parliamentary democracy because it has failed to give the Arabs economic equality and social justice; traditional Islam because it is unable to adjust itself to modern conditions; and Communism because its international outlook disavows Arab nationalism and disregards the individual. This new élite, composed of elements of the new salaried class, army officers, and students, is pressing for radical social change, and it is from this class that the Ba'th draws its support.

The Ba'th's founders were theorists with a vision who have put forth their ideas on social revolution and Arab nationalism more cogently and longer than any of their rivals. Born in the hot-bed of Arab nationalism, Syria, the Ba'th has grown from a purely Syrian party into a regional inter-

* This chapter was completed in May 1966, and reflects events up to that time.

Arab movement with adherents in every Arab country, and branches in most.

Having held power in Syria and Iraq, it has been forced to test its ideology in practice.

The Ba'th Party was founded in 1940 in Syria by two Paris-educated intellectuals, Michel 'Aflaq and Salah ad-Din al-Bitar, and emerged into the open toward the end of 1943 when it participated in Syrian resistance to French intervention in the internal affairs of Syria and Lebanon.

'Aflaq, born in Midan quarter of Damascus in 1912, was the son of Joseph 'Aflaq, a Greek Orthodox grain merchant. Educated in the Greek Orthodox schools, he went to the University of Paris in 1929 where he flirted with Communism and is said to have written articles for the party's publications.¹ He became disillusioned with Communism in 1936, after his return to Syria. Back in Damascus he became a secondary school history instructor and began to preach his doctrine of Arab Nationalism. He founded the Ba'th ("Resurrection") Party in 1940 with his friend of student days, Salah ad-Din al-Bitar. By 1943 'Aflaq was delivering lectures attacking Marxist materialism, and his opposition to Communism has continued ever since.

Small in stature, mild-mannered and with a detached air about him, 'Aflaq is articulate, and although vague by Western standards, he has been an inspiration to many students. A chain smoker, he has little use for affluence and lives modestly, indeed almost penuriously. These attributes have become a symbol among Ba'thists, who generally disdain the comforts and tend to lead rather Spartan lives. In fact, he has written that the comfortable life available to the younger generation in more advanced nations is denied to the Arabs because of the great struggle for the Arab nationalist

movement. 'Aflaq, the party's philosopher, prior to the party upheaval in February 1966 had come to act as an elder statesman--guiding it in its grand strategy, but remaining aloof from small day to day administrative details.

Bitar, born the same year as 'Aflaq, is 'Aflaq's opposite in many ways. Taller and heavier-set than the slender 'Aflaq, Bitar has been the party's organization man and administrator. He is not an orator, nor is he able to give the inspiration that is 'Aflaq's magic quality. They have worked closely together since their student days in Paris with Bitar participating in government office a number of times. 'Aflaq, aside from a three month tenure as Minister of Education in 1949, has avoided the responsibilities of public office. Bitar was Minister of Foreign Affairs from mid-1956 until the union with Egypt in February 1958, and then served as Minister of State in the first UAR cabinet. He has been prime minister several times since the Ba'th came to power in 1963.

By July 1946, 'Aflaq and Bitar felt that their party was sufficiently established to publish a journal--al-Ba'th. In April of the next year the First Ba'th Congress was held in Damascus, with 200 representatives from Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon attending. However, the Ba'th still remained an insignificant political grouping in a country renowned for its multitudinous and ephemeral political parties.

Syria at this time was in the throes of adjusting to peacetime, plagued with inflation and unemployment, asserting its newly-won independence, and determining its ties with the other Arab states. The country was being led by the men who had struggled years to achieve independence, men who belonged to the ruling class--landowners, merchants, and professionals. It was in this atmosphere that the Ba'th Program was first published, setting forth the party's views on Arab nationalism and the economic order.

II. Concepts in the Party Constitution

The dominance of the Arab Nationalist ideal in Ba'thist thinking is made readily apparent in the Ba'th Constitution--it comes first.² The Constitution is prefaced by the slogan

"one Arab Nation with an immortal mission,
the Arab Resurrection Socialist Party, a
popular national revolutionary movement
striving for Arab unity, freedom and
socialism"³

According to Ba'thist doctrine, the Arabs are one nation possessing an indivisible political, cultural, and economic unit which belongs to them alone. The Arab Nation possesses special characteristics which although long suppressed, are capable of being resurrected.

The Constitution states that the Arab Nation's special characteristics include "vitality and creative powers." These characteristics make possible its revival and development and are the mystique of Arab Nationalists everywhere. Without this hope of resurgence Arab Nationalism would not exist.

'Aflaq's historical studies and his acquaintanceship with nineteenth century German philosophy are brought out in the program's section on the "immortal mission" of the Arab Nation. This mission is to revive human values, encourage human development, and strive for peace and cooperation with other nations toward the common goal of comfort and prosperity for all peoples.

Although 'Aflaq and Bitar emphasize the "uniqueness" of the Ba'thist message, the influence of Western concepts is found throughout their teachings. However, 'Aflaq has mentioned that his father often spoke to him of Arabism.⁴

His education in Europe gave him ideas which could be adapted to the problems of the Arab world as he saw them. This does not necessarily mean that he borrowed them, but that they influenced him.⁵ They have resulted in an evolutionary determinism. Furthermore, he came to realize that the negative nationalism characteristic of the Arab nationalist movement at that time was insufficient.⁶ Its negative emotional content had to be replaced by a positive outlook embracing the revival of the Arab people. Consequently, this revival had to be built around a core of nationalist consciousness. In short, Arab unity and social revolution were to be the cure-all for the ills of the Arab World.

An insight into 'Aflaq's thinking on this is provided in a passage of his Ma'rakat al-Masir al-Wahid (The Struggle for One Destiny). 'Aflaq wrote that the party was named the "Arab Resurrection Party not only because it was the first party to believe, ideologically and practically, in Arab unity, and to place its organization on a universal Arab foundation, but also because it believed that any viewpoint and remedy of the vital difficulties of the Arabs, either in part or in toto, which does not emanate from the axiom 'The Unity of the Arab People' is an erroneous outlook and an injurious cure."⁷ The difference of the Ba'th from other Arab political parties is in kind, not in its Arab Nationalism or its socialism, but in its universality. The various national parties in the Arab States did not measure up to the challenge of Arab unity. Neither did the Arab League. Arab unity is a basic, daily, ordered, and continuous struggle and not something to be attained automatically or "some day" when political conditions are ripe. It is not a result of the struggle of the Arab People for independence or socialism but a goal to be simultaneously struggled for. However, unity comes first because it is spiritual.

Imperialism is stated to be "a crime" to be fought by the Arabs by every means. This concept appears to be derived from the influences of the Syrian struggle for independence, which was being carried on during 'Aflaq's formative years. This was a period of economic depression--which probably influenced his economic outlook--and years in which the French hold over Syria and Lebanon was all-pervading, with few concessions to Syrian political desires. Also, this was a period in which feelings of pan-Arab unity were growing, and political strikes, riots, and disturbances were frequent.

Besides setting forth the evils of colonialism, 'Aflaq disparages the various national movements which have risen out of colonialism to combat the ills of Arab society. Among these ills are feudalism, regionalism, sectarianism, and intellectual reaction. He charges that one quality unites all of these movements--negativism. They are the scum which rises to the surface of the feebleness of present Arab society. Civilization must be built and human values cultivated. The Ba'th's goal is not confined to driving the colonizers out and uprooting the internal exploiters, or even ^{to achieving} the freedom and prosperity of the Arab people. They are but means to assuring a universal role for the Arabs, together with the peoples of Asia and Africa.

'Aflaq has stated that during the mid-1930's a decisive turn came about in his thinking. Like many other Arab thinkers he reflected on past Arab glories and the present low state of his people. He concluded that the communism and internationalism to which he had been attracted could not solve the Arab's problems. In any case, communism could not succeed among the Arabs because they could not renounce their nationalism. In 1958 he further stated that he once had "a universalist approach to political problems, but that after I had immersed myself anew into the reality of the Arab world I

concluded that nationalism had not been understood properly in Europe.⁸

However, he acknowledged the deep influence of Marx and Nietzsche on his thinking.

Here lies the crux of 'Aflaq's political philosophy: he is an Arab nationalist with a Western education and Western European attitudes. For a time he was torn between the doctrines of Marxist materialism and romantic nationalism.⁹

This romantic nationalism touches a chord close to nearly all Arab hearts--harking back to the days of glory and the Islamic Arab Empire which stretched from Morocco to ^{the} Indian Ocean. 'Aflaq builds the new Arab Empire on a secular framework instead of Islam, although he realizes that many Islamic cultural heritages--now called Arab cultural values--will remain. No Arab political theorist worthy of the name can disregard his people's religious values. Even Christian secular thinkers in the West, who have faced a less formidable religious obstacle, have taken Christian values into account. But 'Aflaq, being of Christian origin, has been compelled to establish his nationalism on a secular basis, despite the fact that Arab Nationalism is often equated with the Arab Muslims.

'Aflaq goes to great lengths to define his concept of Arab Nationalism distinguishing it and how it differs from other views. He stigmatizes the version of Arab Nationalism which is restrictive state nationalism and which divides the Arabs. Furthermore, he condemns what he terms "racial nationalism"--that which claims the Arabs to be superior--a type of thinking which he finds no different than Nazism with its overtones of racial superiority and oppression of minorities. He stresses the humanitarianism of Arabism. Likewise, he does not proclaim Arabism to be international, which is one of the great

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differences between it and Communism. Communism, according to 'Aflaq, is an attempt to bind everyone with synthetic economic bonds. He feels that this would fail as did the religious state, by its inherent contradictions. He goes as far as to compare the Communist call to internationalism with similar attempts to form a religious state in the Middle Ages. Another Ba'thist writer, Yasin al-Hafiz, has characterized Communism as a new face of Russian nationalism, just as Islam is the past face of Arab nationalism.¹⁰ However, 'Aflaq praises Tito's Yugoslavia because it was the first "socialist" country to cast aside Communist internationalism in favor of nationalism.¹¹

The Ba'th program implies a separation of religion and the state, unlike so many constitutions of the Arab States which declare Islam as the state religion. Nationalism is to be the only tie in the unified Arab State, and religious and other modes of exclusiveness are to be suppressed.

'Aflaq states that "The Arabs today do not want their nationalism to be religious, because religion has another aspect, a field which does not bind the nation but which, on the contrary, divides a single people--although there is no fundamental difference between the religions."¹² However, since Islam is so much a part of Arab culture he is in a difficult position on this facet of Arab Nationalism. 'Aflaq's answer is that Islam must now conform to Arabism rather than shaping it as it did in the early days of Islam. Since the Arab resurrection will only include those aspects of Arabism that are compatible with the modern world and will adapt others through changes, Islam itself, must change to meet the requirements of the new age. Arab Nationalism is not to be constrained by the narrow limits of Islam, which is only an aspect of the larger movement.

Islam, in a sense, ended as a moral and unifying influence among the Arabs when it spread beyond the pale and included non-Arabs. 'Aflaq

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recognizes Islam as an element in Arab Nationalism, but on condition that it must subordinate itself to the secular nationalist movement. In other words, Arab Nationalism has replaced Islam as the driving force of the Arab people. Absolute equality before the law for all citizens is to be laid down as a fundamental constitutional right; thus, all public offices are theoretically open to any citizen regardless of creed. Education is to be secular, free, and compulsory, with all private educational institutions suppressed.

III. Ba'th Socialism

Article 4 of the 1947 Ba'th Constitution states that socialism is necessary for Arab Nationalism, being the system which would allow the Arabs to develop their inherent potentialities. Socialism will enable the Arab nation to increase its production and strengthen its bonds. Believing that wealth in the Arab countries is unjustly distributed, the Program calls for its "fair distribution" among the citizens. However, there is no call for a general nationalization of capital. In line with the generally accepted view among socialists, public utilities, major national resources, and large-scale industrial and transport services would be nationalized. Foreign-owned concessions and company rights would be cancelled. Land reform is envisioned with the size of plots limited to that which the owner can work without "exploitation of the efforts of others."

A dissertation on these socialist principles is found in Fi Sabil Al-Ba'th where 'Aflaq declares that "socialism means that all citizens should share in their country's resources with the intention that they better their life and consequently the life of their nation, because man does not accept his rendering of himself as an end in life."¹³ However, he states that there

are no separate doctrines of socialism and nationalism but that they are "fused into one entity."¹⁴ It is significant that the Ba'th has declared that although it believes in socialism because it would realize social justice, the party would embrace another social system if it found a better one.¹⁵

'Aflaq claims his socialism does not have the materialistic objective of "feeding the hungry and clothing the naked," but the higher one of freeing man's talents and abilities. This means a destruction of the influence of the traditional aristocracy of wealth which has ruled the Arab countries for generations, so that lower classes may break out of the economic grip which has held them in a depressed state and which has blocked their political influence. Here again, he rejects the communist definition of socialism in the works of Marx and Lenin. The Ba'th's socialism is proclaimed to be a new form of nationalism.

In its vision of Arab unity Ba'thist socialism envisions bringing together those Arab countries whose progress is obstructed by their lack of capital and natural resources with their better endowed brethren who would share their wealth.

The Ba'th's attitude toward real estate holdings is spelled out in the party's program. Ownership of buildings is to be limited to what can be personally used. "Exploitation" by means of renting is forbidden. A reference in the constitution to the state guaranteeing a minimum ownership of landed property for all citizens would seem to indicate that private home ownership, as well as agricultural plots, is to be encouraged.

Usury, so prevalent in most parts of the Arab world, is to be abolished. However, interest on money at a reasonable rate is to be allowed. A government bank for agricultural and industrial projects is envisioned; it would issue a currency backed by "national production."

Trade, in all of its forms, is to be controlled by the state. A reference to the maintenance of equilibrium between exports and imports seems to hark back to economic nationalism and autarky, or merely shows a lack of economic sophistication. Following on the path of trade restrictions is the concept of a directed economy for the Arab countries and their industrialization. Another interesting aspect of the Ba'th's economic policy is worker participation and profit sharing in the management of factories, apparently along the lines now practiced in Yugoslavia.

The internal disarray in the Arab world necessitates a far reaching social "revolution;" according to Ba'thist teachings the Arabs do not have time to wait for evolutionary progress, especially since the more advanced countries will continue their rate of progress and make catching up impossible. 'Aflaq lays great stress on a revolution of spirit, especially in the moral and intellectual realms.

The sixth article of the program ends with the ringing exhortation "to rise in revolt against corruption in all spheres of intellectual social and political life." Thus, the Ba'th is not only pushing for a resurrection of Arabism, but for revolution, not evolution, in the fullest sense of the term, a forced reformation of the social and political structure of the Arab countries which ousts old ideas and a decadent spirit. As 'Aflaq states, "the gap and disfigurement in the Arab nationalist structure can only be bridged by a violent wrenching away from the present situation."

In 'Aflaq's eyes the Arab nation's interior is "rotten," filled with social injustice, exploitation, ignorance, weakness in thought, and lacking in tolerance and love. Thus the Arab people must not only struggle against

imperialism and Zionism (another form of imperialism), but against themselves.

Michel 'Aflaq has taken great pains to differentiate his movement from Communism. Besides his thesis that Arab Socialism is an amalgam of nationalism and socialism, he stresses other points of difference. Socialism under the Communist system--since it is a universalist theory and strives to complete world revolution--cannot carry out a sufficient economic readjustment until it achieves world wide revolution. Thus economic conditions in the communist countries are influenced and restricted by this goal. This includes preparation for war and competition with other nations. 'Aflaq has declared that the Communist states pursue a bloc policy and thus "help imperialism."¹⁶

Another difference with Communism is its belief in materialism and disregard for spiritual principles and the small value placed in the individual. As 'Aflaq says, "it permits the slaughter of the individual for the sake of its material existence,"¹⁷ because in Communist theory society is the root. This outlook leads to dictatorship and a mechanical, materialistic society lost to the spirit. His socialism, however, is based on the individual and allows his personal freedom. Another point of difference is the right of ownership. According to 'Aflaq, "Communist socialism went to the utmost limit and did away with the right of possession, and thus destroyed personal and instinctive motives in the individual."¹⁸ Ba'thism preserves this right, but limits it fairly narrowly.

Closely intertwined with the Ba'th's economic views and its Arab Nationalism are the party's domestic program and what it terms its social policy. In line with the considerable emphasis on the role of the individual, Ba'th doctrine envisions a democratic state of the parliamentary constitutional type with the executive responsive to the legislative organ. In contrast

with what has been the practice in the Middle East, parliament is to be elected directly and freely by the people. The unified Arab state is to be decentralized and judicial authority is to be independent of the other arms of the government.

Absolute equality before the law is guaranteed to all citizens, as is freedom of expression. However, these appear to be abridged by the addition of the clause so often found in Middle Eastern political documents-- "within the limits of the law." All religious sectarian, tribal, racial and regional "factions" are to be fought. Military service is to be compulsory.

Under "Social Policy" the family and children are recognized as a trust and are to be protected. Marriage is a national duty to be encouraged and facilitated by the state. This probably refers to breaking down some of the existing barriers to marriage, especially the custom of bride price.

In consonance with socialist thinking, medical care is to be provided free by the state. The full employment doctrine is embraced in the section of the program devoted to the role of labor. A minimum wage is alluded to, as are disability benefits, paid vacations, and old age pensions. Free trade unions for workers and farmers are to be encouraged and special labor tribunals are to adjudicate labor disputes.

In conformity with the Ba'th's thesis of awakening the Arab people, the program includes a special article relating to the encouragement of Arab culture in all of its aspects. Likewise, private organizations and political parties are to be given opportunities to function. The Constitution also reiterates a continued theme in Ba'thist rhetoric, namely freedom of expression by the individual and the press. However, this may be circumscribed by the higher Arab national interest.

Reflecting the backgrounds of the Ba'th's founders, special reference is made to the position of mental labor; it is placed on a par with its physical.

scholarship.

As in the case with socialist dogma everywhere, class differences and their distinctions are to be abolished. This applies, not only to economic classes, but to those paragons of Arabic civilization--the bedouin. In Ba'thist eyes they are an embarrassment which retards progress and they must be eliminated by sedentarization. In order to bring the new order to the Arab world the Ba'th envisions the creation of a new generation by means of education.

The program's pronouncement on foreign policy is a ringing denunciation of imperialism and foreign influence in the Arab countries. A sweeping renunciation of all treaties and agreements concluded by the Arab states limiting Arab sovereignty is to be made. Despite this tone of belligerency, the Arabs are to cooperate with other nations, in creating a harmonious, free, secure, and progressing world.

The Ba'th's continual emphasis on the role of the individual, his freedom of expression and action, and his opportunity to develop himself continually, seems to conflict with another basic Ba'thist concept--the Arab nationalist movement. In his writing 'Aflaq warns of the danger of the tyranny of the group over the individual; yet almost in the same breath he speaks of the supremacy of the Arab nationalist movement. Since Ba'thist ideology obliges the Arab citizen to recognize and participate in the mission of Arab Nationalism, no Arab can stand aside from this struggle. Thus, it would seem that individual freedom must be circumscribed for the benefit of the immortal mission, no matter how much the rights of the individual are stressed in Ba'thist ideology. Arab Nationalism must take precedence, since it is history being carried out and, thus, it is inevitable and supreme. Here is a basic conflict

between 'Aflaq's nineteenth century national liberalism and the influence of twentieth century nationalist totalitarianism. 'Aflaq attempts to reconcile this conflict by stressing that the individual through education will be awakened to the necessity of conforming to the nationalist movement.¹⁹ Until the people reach this point, however, they must be led by the enlightened men who have reached the higher state where their own interests and those of Arab Nationalism are one. Bitar and 'Aflaq had one of their basic differences on this point. 'Aflaq contended that the party could not be a mass movement, since it would be weakened by dilution. On the other hand, Bitar argued that it was necessary to broaden the membership in order to make the party politically stronger. In the end, 'Aflaq won.²⁰

Carrying further this concept of enlightenment, 'Aflaq has stated that even those who now oppose the Ba'th's ideas possess a "hidden will" to Arab Nationalism that has not yet been revealed to them. Also, underlying 'Aflaq's thinking seems to be a suffering motif. He has stated that "The driving factor in the Arab world is suffering," which he regards as a boon which makes more certain the attainment of ideals.²¹ Another radical departure from current Arab nationalist thought has been 'Aflaq's ideas on the subject of the "new Arabs." He called on the Arabs to stop blaming imperialism for all of their ills and to regard it as "a result of our own inaction in directing a change in our rotten internal situation and not as a cause for this situation and its persistence."²²

IV. The Ba'th Struggle for Power

Aside from its participation in anti-French demonstrations during and right after the War, the Ba'th played an insignificant role in Syrian politics until the Syrian election of 1947 when it attempted to form a

coalition with several other Damascus political groupings in order to break the Nationalist Bloc's hold. 'Aflaq unsuccessfully ran for parliament.

The party remained almost in oblivion until the coup of Husni ^Qz-Za'im on March 30, 1949, when it greated the overthrow of the Nationalists and pinned its hopes on the "new order." However, Za'im's suppression of all political parties and his increasingly dictatorial methods soon alienated the Ba'th. When Za'im was overthrown in mid-August 1949, 'Aflaq joined the Hashim al-Atasi cabinet as Minister of Education, but resigned because of dissatisfaction with the parliamentary elections that fall.

After Adib ash-Shishakli openly seized power in December 1951, all political parties were ordered dissolved, although the Ba'th, along with Haurani's Arab Socialist Party, had given Shishakli support prior to the coup. In late December 1952, 'Aflaq, Salah ad-Din al-Bitar and Akram al-Haurani were arrested. Early in January 1953 the three detainees escaped abroad.

In September 1953 the Ba'th and Haurani's Arab Socialist Party formally amalgamated to become the Arab Socialist Resurrection party. This amalgamation necessitated no change in the wording of the Ba'th Constitution, except for the party name. 'Aflaq, Bitar, and Haurani returned to Syria under a general amnesty issued by Shishakli following the elections. By the time of Shishakli's overthrow in 1954, the Ba'th's connections with certain army officers became apparent and a new pro-Ba'th officer grouping emerged under the leadership of Col. 'Adnan al-Malki, who had a large army following.

During the 1954 election campaign the army gave the Ba'th considerable behind-the-scenes support. It was the best organized and most active of all parties, and social reform and anti-Westernism were its strongest issues. It hit them hard, condemning the ruling oligarchy based on land and industry.

In the end the Ba'th won 17 seats and was further strengthened by the election of at least five supporters. The new parliament soon became divided into two camps with the Populists and the Ba'th teamed against the Nationalists.

Finally in early 1955, when radical Nationalist leader Sabri al-'Asali formed a new cabinet, the Ba'th suddenly switched its support to him. 'Asali's internal program reflected Ba'thist doctrine and heavy emphasis was laid on social and welfare programs. Syria's previous limited cooperation with the West was blocked by this maneuver.

The assassination of Col. Malki in early 1955 by a member of the Syrian Social National Party, the Ba'th's best-organized political opponents, gave the Ba'th a martyr. SSNP elements in Syria were rounded up by the police and army and the SSNP was crushed.²³

By infiltrating the government, monopolizing the government propaganda bureau, intimidating the Syrian press, and inciting the students, the Ba'th and its new Communist allies began to dominate the political situation.²⁴

Relations with the Soviet Bloc became warm and those with Egypt very close.

The party's policy of collaboration with the Communists, however, brought dissension between its Socialist and Resurrection wings. 'Aflaq's followers, the Resurrection wing, opposed the Socialists led by Akram al-Haurani, who favored the Communist alliance. Also, 'Aflaq opposed the heavy emphasis given to Egyptian-Syrian cooperation because he believed it harmful to the cause of general Arab unity and urged closer ties with Iraq.²⁵ However, by mid 1956 the party had changed its attitude and was pushing for early union with Cairo.

In the fall the Ba'th was leading a coalition composed of Communists, left-wing Nationalists, individual Populists and Independents with pro-

Egyptian, pro-Saudi, or pro-Soviet inclinations, and Khalid al-Azm's "progressive" following. Arrayed against this dynamic force were the traditional and conservative elements, badly split, cowed by the threat of the mob and the army, lacking forceful leadership, and fighting a rear guard action.

The Suez War of 1956 doomed whatever power the traditional and pro-Western Syrian political forces still held. Meanwhile in May 1956, the leftist army officer faction had formed a Revolutionary Command Council which included both Ba'thists and Communists. Among the civilian politicians included was Akram al-Haurani.

An open break between Ba'th and the Communists finally came in the fall of 1957. Communist Afif al-Bizri had become Chief of Staff and his brother, Salah, commanded the Popular Resistance Organization, which was composed of nearly 100,000 armed civilians, many of whom were Communist sympathizers. Although Bitar attacked the Communists in traditional Ba'thist terms as early as February 1957, declaring that "Communism is foreign to the Arabs, just as the capitalist system is foreign to them," no move had been made to end the cooperation between the two parties. Communist strength was at an all-time high, Khalid al-'Azm's popularity and influence were very strong, and his close cooperation with the Communists posed a threat to the Ba'th. The formal break came in September when Haurani stated in parliament that the Communists were "insignificant." At the time, there was considerable misgiving within the Ba'th about the extent of Communist penetration.

Doubting their ability to overcome the threat to their position by means of an alliance with the right and the badly split anti-Communist elements in the army, the Ba'th's leadership saw a way out in union with

Egypt. Because of their strong pro-Nasir stand and the close parallel of their economic and pan-Arab ideology with that of Nasir, Ba'thist leaders were confident they could direct a monolithic political movement along Ba'thist lines in the united country. Nasir would provide the material force that the party lacked.

The first direct step was made on December 9, when 'Aflaq announced that the Ba'th was drafting a parliamentary bill for federal union with Egypt. By late December a behind-the-scenes struggle for control of the country was being carried out at full tilt between the Ba'th's supporters and a Communist-'Azm alliance. The Egyptians used their considerable influence to assist the Ba'th. The union was announced on January 23, 1958.

Syria became the testing ground between the Ba'thist principle of control by party arrived at through a process of consensus by the members and Nasir's concept of direction from the top. The Ba'th's scheme had been to dissolve the party in Syria and replace it with the party's control over Nasir's National Union. This new movement would assist the regime in attaining its revolutionary goals, outside as well as inside the United Arab Republic. The party's leaders soon discovered that, in Nasir's eyes, they were just one facet of the power structure and that candidates for the National Union were to be drawn from the various elements of Syrian society. In practice this included such disparate groups as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Nationalist Party. In order to enforce his authority Nasir appointed former Ba'thist supporter 'Abd al-Hamid as-Sarraj as his proconsul in Damascus. With Sarraj in charge of the elections Ba'thist candidates were effectively shut out and few won. In addition to manipulating the elections to the Ba'th's disadvantage, Nasir, through Sarraj, clamped down hard on Ba'thist

sources of power: unions, students, the Aleppa party paper al-Jamahir, and army officers. Many of the latter were transferred to Egypt and replaced in Syria by Egyptians.²⁶ Meanwhile, Bitar and Haurani were moved to Cairo and cut off from real responsibility and from their Syrian power base.²⁷ Dissatisfied with their lot, they resigned in December 1959. Soon 'Aflaq and several other party leaders exiled themselves to Beirut, where the party's Fourth Congress was held in the fall of 1960 and its differences with Nasir were spelled out. These included charges of suspension of basic liberties and the institution of a police state in the UAR, Nasir's tactical alliance with conservative elements, and his "personality cult." 'Aflaq received the support of the majority of the delegates, but a splinter faction led by 'Abdullah ar-Rimawi broke away and condemned the party for anti-unity tendencies. Rimawi, now expelled from the party, continued to lead the rump faction, called the Revolutionary Ba'th Arab Socialist Party and which received support from Nasir and was based in Damascus. This defection soon was followed by that of Fu'ad ar-Rikabi, who had been secretary-general of the party's Iraqi branch. His charges were similar to those of Rimawi, with the additional embellishment that the party leadership had been in touch with Western intelligence agencies. This phase of the struggle was characterized by indirect Ba'thist attacks on Nasir, while he used the full force of his propaganda media to discredit the party, striking hard at its lack of mass following and secularism in an Islamic culture.

Syria's revolt and breakaway from Egypt in September 1961, put the Ba'th in a quandary and led to another party dispute. However, Salah ad-Din al-Bitar and Akrem al-Haurani soon signed a manifesto supporting the new Syrian regime. This caused consternation in party circles; Bitar soon back-tracked and adopted the majority's view that, while Nasir had precipitated

the revolt by his high-handed tactics, there should be reunification on a federal basis. This was the first time that the Ba'th had considered this approach. The federation would be on the party's terms, which included the formation of a National Front and freedom of party activity. Cooperation with the new Damascus regime was withheld. This stance alienated the Haurani section of the party, which was adamant against reunion with Egypt and pushed for cooperation with the new government and endorsement of its vehement attacks against Nasir. Finally, Haurani was expelled from the party in May 1962, during the party's Fifth Congress.

By now the Ba'th had arrived at an ideologically precarious point. It was caught between its goal of Arab unity and the problem of reconciling the differences with Nasir. This was partially surmounted by blaming the ^{unsound} rupture on the ^{unsound} execution of policies ~~in an unsound manner~~. This bit of casuistry brought forth a new splinter grouping which agreed with Haurani's viewpoint that it was impossible to deal with Nasir. This grouping, mostly Lebanese, did not go so far as to join with Haurani's faction, but it nearly captured the leadership of the Lebanese branch of the party. By now there were two pro-Nasir rump factions (Rimawi and Rikabi) and two anti-Nasir ones (Haurani and the Lebanese), while the orthodox party attempted to hew a fine line between traditional party doctrine and pragmatic compromise with Nasir. ^{rump factions,}

Of these, only Haurani remained a political factor in Syria, even after the March 1963 Ba'thist coup. Apparently, this was due to his substantial following in the country, as well as his army connections. In any case, his support was sought by some regime leaders, especially General Amin al-Hafiz, over an extensive period of time, despite disagreement within the party over his status. Eventually he was imprisoned for a time, but released at the end of 1965.

To the casual observer there appears to be very little to chose between Ba'thism and Nasirism, yet there is sufficient difference of viewpoint. Both are "socialistic" and both stand for pan-Arabism.²⁸

Nasirism, as its name implies, has been largely dependent on a single individual who is to be the sole leader of the Arabs. The Arab tendency to personalize their politics has been a great advantage to Nasir. He has symbolized most of the aspirations of the Arab people. In a number of ways Nasirism's attraction has lain in its generalities and its somewhat pragmatic approach. It thereby has had a greater appeal to the lower classes, who have found Ba'th ideology too complex.

Another important point of difference is that Nasir has relied on the power of the Egyptian state to promote his socialism. His attempts to "internationalize" the Egyptian-based Arab Socialist Union as an organization competitive to the Ba'th in the Arab countries have been abortive.

Ba'thism's strength, on the other hand, has been based on its idology and organization. Although 'Aflaq was widely regarded as synonymous with the Ba'th until the February 1966 coup, the party did not depend on his personality to carry on. Rather it based itself on his and Bitar's ideological concepts. The decline of Bitar's and 'Aflaq's influence in the party during the years preceding the coup emphasizes this point.

Buttressing the ideological basis of the party is its organization. It is here that 'Aflaq's acquaintance with the Communist party stands out. Roughly speaking, the Ba'th is organized along Communist Party lines, with cells, an overall central committee, local committees, and secret members. However, there is a basic difference: matters of policy are threshed out in a democratic manner on a local level and there is considerable autonomy, so

long as there is adherence to the principles of the party constitution. The party has members in all Arab countries and branches in most of them. Representatives of the branches participate in the periodic party conventions. The central committee of the party, called the National Command, is elected by representatives from the branch national parties, which are each headed by their own Regional Commands, at the party's National Congresses. At these conclaves party policies are discussed and decisions made by vote. Usually these meetings are long and tumultuous. The sessions are secret and thus subject to many conflicting rumors. Decisions are rarely published in their entirety. This is a manifestation of the party's conspiratorial mentality, a product of its long underground activity, especially outside Syria. Another feature is the existence of secret members, who sometimes pose as members of other Arab ⁿNationalist groupings.

V. The Ba'th in Power

The Ba'th has attained varying degrees of power three times, in Syria in the years 1957-58, in Iraq from February to November 1963, and again in Syria from March 1963 to the present. In each case, it has been subject to varying degrees of support from like-minded elements, especially the military. As has been recounted, the first Syrian experiment ended in union with Egypt because the Communists and their allies came to threaten Ba'thist domination. During this period the Ba'th was too busy attaining power and maintaining it to institute its social and economic ideas.

The Ba'th's first real chance to carry out its programs was in Iraq after the overthrow of General Abd al-Karim Qasim in February 1963. There had been a short "honeymoon" period following Qasim's 1958 coup against the monarchy, but the Ba'th soon broke with him over his dictatorial style and

cooperation with the Communists. The party then opposed him in a clandestine fashion, and a faction led by Fu'ad Rikabi, with the backing of 'Abd al-Hamid Sarraj, carried out an abortive assassination attempt against Qasim in October 1959.²⁹ This resulted in a drastic crackdown on the party and a show trial of Ba'thist conspirators. Communist elements in the Qasim regime perpetrated a number of atrocities against Ba'thists, which engendered a bitter hatred of the Communists.

After Qasim's overthrow the party moved quickly to dominate the new government and secured the most important cabinet posts. Then it began a wholesale purge of non-Ba'thist elements, including many who might have been favorably disposed toward the new regime. Most important among the non-Ba'thist participants in the new government was the new Iraqi President 'Abd as-Salam Muhammad 'Arif, reputedly a strong pro-Nasirist at the time. Communists were rounded up by the hundreds and vengeance was wreaked on many for their past persecution of Ba'thists. The Communist Party was greatly disrupted and Qasim's war against the Kurds was renewed in a more vigorous and ruthless manner. During its nine months in power the party largely disregarded the desires of other political elements, even those whose general sympathies paralleled those of the Ba'th. Although it continued to reiterate its goals of democracy and Arab unity, the Ba'th allowed no other open political activity. Censorship continued and the regime-controlled Baghdad Radio broadcast only Ba'thist viewpoints and propaganda.

Little Ba'thist ideology was put into practice, partly because the party retained power for such a short time. No industries were nationalized, and the important Iraq Petroleum Company concession was untouched (Qasim already had seized more than 99% of the company's unexploited concession area).

In spite of the party's advocacy of socialism, the regime made a number of attempts to win the confidence of businessmen, but the effort was considerably blunted by repeated doctrinaire statements by Deputy Premier 'Ali Salih as-Sa'di. His declarations fanned the dispute between the "hard" and "soft" elements in the party which led to a split several months later.

Prior to its seizure of power the Iraqi Ba'th had but a limited membership, probably less than a thousand and far too few to govern the country. Immediately after Qasim's overthrow tens of thousands of applications for party membership flooded party headquarters. Finally, no new members were accepted, in part to protect the party against penetration by hostile elements. But many were enrolled in the National Guard. It was this new group, virtually unindoctrinated and uncontrolled by the party, which carried out the majority of the outrages blamed on the Ba'th. Hundreds of Communists were killed by party members, however. 30

The Ba'th's struggle with Nasir over the question of Arab unity brought about the ouster in May of the sole pro-Egyptian in the Ba'thist dominated cabinet. Opponents within the government and army were purged and largely replaced by Ba'thist followers. In an attempt to create a counterweight to the army, which never really became Ba'thist controlled, the party expanded the armed paramilitary National Guard, founded in 1961, to a strength of 65,000. Because of the dilution of the party cadres in this force, it soon got out of hand and perpetrated numerous crimes, many of which were nothing more than the settling of personal grudges.

The Ba'thist triumph in Syria was quite another matter, largely as a result of the special circumstances that existed there and its longer time in power. Ba'thist doctrine has been carried out here to a larger degree. All

banks and large industries, nationalized during the union with Egypt and de-nationalized after secession, have again been nationalized, as have other enterprises as well, while foreign trade now has been put under government control, but not as a government agency. Land reform has been pushed; worker participation in management and profits has been extended.

In Syria a number of articles of the Ba'th Constitution have not been applied or else have been ignored. Among these is that relating to the institution of a parliamentary constitutional system; no move has been made in this direction. So far real estate, other than that in the industrial and agricultural fields, has not been affected. The status of the trade unions is hazy; they are controlled by the state, but many of their leaders are out of sympathy with the Ba'th and look to Nasir for leadership.

Press freedom, right of assembly, and other basic rights are severely limited, but probably not any more than in most other Arab countries -- or many non-Arab countries for that matter. Opposition political parties do not operate openly. In contrast to Iraq, the local Communists have been treated mildly. In part this stems from the fact that they, too, have been anti-Nasir, and Nasirism is the Syrian regime's greatest bogey. A partial explanation for this difference is that the strength of Nasirism has been far greater in Syria than in Iraq. The regime has been constantly harassed by pro-Nasir activities. This has influenced the Ba'th to cooperate with some anti-Nasir elements. In Syria, too, the party has been torn between its "pragmatic" faction and those who press for carrying out its ideology, notwithstanding the precarious political situation upon which the Ba'thist regime is based.

Since Arab unity is one of the pillars of Ba'thist doctrine, the question of union with Nasir's Egypt became paramount soon after the Ba'thist coup in Syria. Preceding actual negotiations on the terms of union, Syrian and Iraqi Ba'thist leaders conducted general discussions with Nasir which, for the most part, turned into an indictment by Nasir of the Ba'th's failings. Taking the offensive, he charged the Syrian Ba'th's leaders with sabotage of the union between the two countries, a fact that was difficult for them to deny, since in effect they had done so in order to preserve the party. At all times during the discussions Nasir had the upper hand, with 'Aflaq and Bitar being forced to defend themselves and in so doing appearing as bumbling, inarticulate tyros. Although the Ba'th in fact has a much more developed ideological consistency than Nasir's pragmatic Arab Socialism, the party ideologues were made to look like theorists without a system and men who had never met the demands of practical politics. Nasir continually pressed for submergence of the Ba'th into a position of sharing its power not only with him, but with his Syrian and Iraqi partisans under the auspices of the Arab Socialist union or a successor to it. He had struck one of the party's greatest weak spots, its professions of a democratic basis in the face of its practice which autocratically denies effective participation in public affairs by rival political organizations.³¹ In March the two Ba'thist regimes initiated talks aimed at uniting the three countries into a reconstituted United Arab Republic, largely because of pressures in Syria. From the beginning there was a clash of wills, with the Ba'th attempting to secure agreement from Nasir terms which would maintain the party's power in Syria and Iraq. Nasir, on the other hand, demanded domination of the proposed state, although he craftily proposed a plebiscite on the question of a

collegiate or single presidency. The Ba'th, remembering its fate after the union of Syria and Egypt in 1958, was insistent that the executive be a collective one, the government federal, and that there be considerable autonomy for the three regions. This adamant posture caused the resignation of the five pro-Nasir ministers in the Syrian cabinet. Soon the negotiations degenerated into maneuvers by each side to saddle the other with responsibility for failure to achieve unity. Finally, in an effort to save face all around, agreement on paper was reached which provided for a federal union with a president and a federal parliament.³²

Although the fiction of unity between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq continued, Nasir had determined to overthrow the Baghdad and Damascus regimes. Nasir fomented anti-regime demonstrations in Syria, and Egyptian-backed coup plots were suppressed in Damascus and Baghdad. Meanwhile, al-Ahram, under the guidance of Muhammad Hasanain Haikal, carried on a vicious propaganda campaign against the Syrian Ba'th, with the latter futilely attempting a reconciliation with Cairo. A last effort by Syria on July 18, was aborted by an attempted pro-Nasir coup in Damascus on the same day. The Ba'thist regime reacted with unusual severity and summarily executed 28 of the rebels. Along with them died the proposed Tripartite Union.

Despite Nasir's denunciation of the unity agreement in his annual July 23rd speech commemorating the Egyptian Revolution, the Ba'th still maintained that no meaningful unity could come about without including Egypt. Even at this late stage the Syrian Ba'th's Iraqi counterpart attempted to heal the break in August by means of a delegation sent to Cairo and led by non-Ba'thist President 'Arif. His mission was futile and Egyptian propaganda attacks continued unabated.

The Ba'th next move was of a defensive nature, steps toward a union between Syria and Iraq. An economic unity agreement was drawn up in September, which provided for a supreme Economic Planning Council for the two countries. This was followed by a declaration of military unity in early October, whereby the armies were to be under a single command. On September 17 a feeler was put out by the Ba'th National (Pan-Arab) Command calling for union of the two countries.

A declaration by the National Command on October 27 calling for Syro-Iraqi union was a product of the party's most important conference since its first in 1947. Held in Damascus from October 5th to 23rd, the Sixth National Congress was the first held while the party was in power and may be considered a landmark in the history of the party. Present were over a hundred representatives from nearly every Arab country and of Ba'thist students abroad. Aside from the recommendation for Iraqi-Syrian unity, other important decisions reached were for emphasis on collective farming in the new union, the formation of a Palestinian military unit and the use of force to block Israeli diversion of the Jordan River, support for the Yemeni republican government and backing for Algeria in its dispute with Morocco.³³

Evidence of a change in Ba'thist ideology was the declaration of the Congress on foreign policy. In a comprehensive statement on the subject the party, while maintaining its opposition to imperialism, emphasized the party's identity with "oppressed" peoples everywhere, thus echoing a familiar Marxist doctrine. Added to the old charge that imperialism is a logical out-growth of capitalism was the new allegation that racial segregation is also a capitalistic manifestation. Capitalism must not only be abolished in the Arab countries, but in the whole world and "socialist systems established on

its ruins."³⁴ A word of caution was inserted here stating that the party rejected the Soviet "socialist camp," although it acknowledged a great debt to the communist socialist experiences and their rich heritage of theoretical and applied knowledge and experience.

The announcement then proceeded to state that the capitalist and socialist worlds could not be viewed in the same perspective. The Party's position vis a vis capitalism is revolutionary, whereas socialism is a common link with the socialist camp, as is the struggle against imperialism. Thus, friendship with the "socialist camp" should be consolidated. While at times there may be differences of opinion with communist states, these differences are on ways and means, while those with the capitalist states are basic and radical. In spite of this community of interest with the "socialist camp" the Ba'th did not propose alignment, since this would tie the party to all of its political and ideological positions. Much of this siding with the communist countries was motivated by ideology, especially under the influence of the Sa'di faction on the proceedings of the Conference. Characteristic of the Congress was a shift from emphasis on nationalistic problems to an emphasis on the "spiritual" aspects. Certainly the Sixth Conference resulted in a shift leftward in Ba'th ideology. Confirming this was the election of a new thirteen-man National Command, which emphasized youth rather than the experience of the party's older stalwarts. Most were in their early thirties and only five over forty years of age. Most surprising of all, party founder Selah ad-Din al-Bitar was dropped from the Command. This dénouement confirmed the more leftward orientation of the party, with the moderates in the eclipse, despite 'Aflaq's selection as secretary-general. The failure of Talib Shabib, an Iraqi moderate, to secure re-election to the Command was a portent of a growing struggle in the Iraqi branch.

Hardly had the party seized power in Iraq than it came to be divided between doctrinaire "hardliners" and moderates. By the summer of 1963 the division had become open, with the "hardliner" faction led by 'Ali Sa'di, Minister of Interior, who wanted to socialize the country rapidly, exclude all other political elements from power, and adopt a tough policy toward Nasir.³⁵ Also, he pushed for a cool attitude toward the Soviet Union, which had strongly backed Qasim and the Iraqi Communists.³⁶ The moderates, led by Foreign Minister Shabib, and Minister of State Hazim Jawad, desired a cooperative policy with non-Ba'thists sympathetic to the party, a pragmatic approach to carrying out socialistic programs, especially nationalization, and a conciliatory policy toward Nasir.³⁷

Shortly before the party's National Congress in Damascus, the Iraqi branch held elections which the Sa'di faction won. It was this group, in concert with a like-minded Syrian faction, that pushed through the doctrinaire policies of the Damascus National Congress the next month. The moderates packed a meeting of the Iraqi's party's leadership on November 13th and carried out a power play which gave them domination of the Iraqi Command. Furthermore, with the support of B'thist army officers, Sa'di was exiled to Spain. The "hardliners'" reaction was to bring the National Guard out into the streets demanding Sa'di's return. Neither the Ba'thist military nor the party's civilian leadership was willing to use the force necessary to crush their National Guard compatriots. Thus, a stalemate ensued and the government was paralyzed.

At this juncture the National Command of the Ba'th stepped in by sending Command members, including 'Aflaq, to Baghdad. They declared the regional election illegal, and also exiled Jawad and Shabib to Lebanon, thus attempting to conciliate Sa'di's supporters. This move, in effect, was a takeover of the Iraqi Government by the Ba'th Party National Command, a group largely

composed of ~~Non-Iraqis~~.

The Iraqi army, angered by Syrian interference in Iraqi affairs, dismayed by the National Guard's actions and regarding it as a potential threat, moved into Baghdad on November 18, 1963, and overthrew the regime. The leaders of the army units included some Ba'thist officers, and the new regime set up by the army included civilians and military members of the party's moderate faction.³⁸ The party, however, no longer was in control of the country; that had passed to the military. The army proceeded to crush the National Guard and arrest members of the Sa'di faction. This was followed by a purge of Ba'thists from civilian and army posts. In February 1964, Shabib and Javad were barred from an attempted return to Iraq. This resulted in an extension of the purge. In September the 'Arif regime announced the exposure of an alleged Ba'thist plot and arrested many party members. Although some Ba'thists have been released from prison, the party remains suppressed.

In Iraq, the party is still under a cloud for its high-handed actions while in power; many of its sympathizers have become disillusioned, and it has a long upward struggle to regain strength and effective leadership. There does remain, however, a considerable reservoir of sentiment for Ba'thist goals, a weakened but well-constructed party organization, and undetermined but latent strength in the army. The Sa'di faction of the party appears to be in eclipse, although Sa'di is still adamant in his extremist views.

The culmination of this struggle was the party's Seventh Congress in February 1964, especially called to deal with the Sa'di "deviation." In this meeting he had an ally in Hammud as-Sufi, his Syrian counterpart, who had engineered Bitar's expulsion from the National Command a short time previously because Bitar has publicly charged that the Iraqi Ba'thists had employed terroristic methods in contravention of party doctrine. The Congress threshed

out the matter, despite obstructive tactics by the radical faction led by Sa'di and Sufi and supported by a number of Lebanese members. It ended with the radicals' refusal to recognize the new party Command elected at the Congress or its resolutions. The Congress watered down the radical resolutions of its predecessor, in particular the attitude toward the world "socialist camp." Another result was a dampening of open party factionalism for nearly a year. It had been a bitter struggle for the 'Aflaq-Bitar partisans, who won only because of military support thrown to them via the Syrian Command, which now included seven army officers out of its fifteen members elected at the Syrian Region's Congress a short time before.³⁹ It is interesting to note that this power play brought down Moscow's wrath on the party for rightist deviation.

Sa'di was allowed to return to Syria for a while in 1964, where he attempted to organize his sympathizers in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. This was aimed at securing a reversal of the National Command's position. In mid-1964 Sa'di failed to organize a meeting of his faction in Lebanon and then left for Yugoslavia. Some months later he moved to Greece and then back to Lebanon. He still considers himself a true Ba'thist.

With their compatriots in Baghdad pushed from power, the Syrian Ba'thists came to be an embattled regime isolated from nearly all other Arab states. Egypt and Iraq were in active opposition to them. Despite the necessity of putting up a common front against its enemies, Syria was kept in a constant state of unrest by factionalism and jockeying.

Meanwhile, the régime was plagued by a deteriorating economic situation, in great part propelled by ^{the} business community's fears of socialistic measures in the offing, and an economic boycott by Syria's neighbors. This culminated in a merchant's strike in Homs. Damascus reacted with vigor, and

troops in Homs bombarded the market area, causing hundreds of casualties. Attempts by military strongman Amin al-Hafiz, President of the National Revolutionary Council, to win the confidence of the business community and to broaden support for the government by proposing to include former Ba'thist Akram al-Haurani in the cabinet caused further dissension in the ruling group. Practical considerations were forcing the party to moderate its socialist doctrines. Even Bitar openly advocated cooperation with the business community, stating that the government never would be "more than a partner in the private sector."⁴⁰

The Ba'thist regime in Syria was subject to the usual civilian-military strains, with the civilian Ba'thists retaining a surprising amount of influence. The country was directed by a twenty-man National Revolutionary Command Council composed equally of army officers and civilians. Half of the officers were Ba'thists and a majority of the civilians were party supporters.⁴¹ At first, however, considerable infighting had occurred between pro- and anti-Nasir officers, with the former finally being purged. Through it all the army, headed by Hafiz, appeared to dominate affairs and it seemed that Syria had returned to the era which began in 1949. There was a difference now in that the army was led by Ba'thists who, despite their military background, were restrained to a considerable degree by party doctrine and discipline. In large part this was due to the role of Hafiz, who was able to play the part of arbiter between the officer factions. Those rivalries, in addition to reflecting the doctrinal disputes within the party, were complicated by sectarian overtones. One faction, led by Col. Salah Jadid, represented a minority grouping of Alawites and Druze. Jadid's bias was a doctrinaire one and anti-Nasir. Another's spokesman was Alawite Col. Muhammad 'Umran, a moderate in his views and a Bitar supporter. He and Bitar leaned

toward a reconciliation with Nasir. In any event, the army remained the final arbiter on the Syrian scene, its cohesiveness strengthened by a common fear of Nasir which tended to mute and limit its internal disputes.

The problem of army-civilian rivalry finally came to a head in late 1965 and ended with an open break between the Aflaq-led majority of the party and the military faction backed by the extremist Salah Jadid, ^{now a} major-general. It is difficult to determine whether ideological or civilian-military differences precipitated the break. In any case, the struggle within the army between Hafiz and Jadid culminated in the National Command's forcing the resignation of the Jadid-oriented Zu'ayyin cabinet and the dissolving of the party's Syrian Regional Command.

Bitar succeeded to the prime minister's post in an atmosphere reminiscent of Syria's pre-UAR period, with various military commanders positioning their units for a showdown and threats of a "march on Damascus" by dissident officers. The result was that the National Command was ousted in a military coup carried out by Jadid's extremist military-civilian group on February 23, 1966. A provisional party command was set up and the orthodox leadership, including 'Aflaq, Bitar, Hafiz, and Ba'th Party Secretary-General Munif ar-Razzaz either were arrested or sent into hiding. All were denounced and charged with "reactionary" mentalities, rightist connections, plotting, and to cap it all, 'Aflaq was described as "selfish."⁴²

The parallel between the action of the National Command to dismiss the regional command and assume power, as it did in the party's Iraqi crisis, is of interest and the result was similar; the military intervened to redress the situation. Following the coup 'Aflaq made a public statement on the problem of the party and the military which was published in al-Ahrar on February 25, 1966. 'Aflaq stated that some of the party's military men

organized themselves into cliques and these attempted to dominate the party, rather than having the party control their political activities. He emphasized that while the party wanted strong army connections its leaders must not be army men, otherwise their influence would be that backed by military force, not party ideology. In the same statement he mentioned the problem of leftist extremism in the party, pointing out that some members tried to "outbid" others in their leftist tendencies. At the same time he declared that the party was now in a better position to "open" discussion with the Communists than in the past because the latter were no longer a threat to the Arab nationalist movement, since local Communist movements had proved to be a failure outside the Communist Bloc.

VI. Prospects

At present (1966) Ba'thism rules only in Syria. It is beset by many enemies: the conservatives and religious leaders, the Communists, military men eager for power, Nasirism, its lack of popular support, and its own doctrine.

The latter seems to be its most deadly enemy. Certainly doctrinaire attitudes and actions and internal dissension were largely responsible for the early demise of the Iraqi Ba'thist regime. The Iraqi people were not ready for more revolution, nor for their army to be rivaled by a party militia. The Party's National Guard came to be equated to the Communist "goon squads" during the Qasim era. Neither did the Iraqis desire to be directed by outsiders, even if they were fellow Arabs. In other words, excesses and internal squabbling quickly ended Ba'th rule in Iraq. In Syria a similar pattern has emerged with the extremists ousting the party's founders and with the military very much dominating the scene. Popular resentment is widespread, and out of fear the regime has felt forced to resort to increasingly heavy-handed tactics.

in order to keep its grip. Also, a new pattern of dealing with its most bitter enemies has been practiced: summary executions for unsuccessful conspirators.

The internal dissensions and the heavy-handed actions appear to be the product of a newer party element, one which is not influenced by the romantic nationalism that so affected Bitar and 'Aflaq. This "doctrinaire" group, of which the Iraqi 'Ali Salih as-Sa'di is the foremost exponent, believes in a militant socialism and de-emphasizes the pan-Arab aspects of Ba'thism. It is they who have led the party away from 'Aflaq's ideals, who have increased and organized the party's conspiratorial mentality and tendencies, and who are ruthless. Many of these are the men who have spent years underground in conspiracy and carried out political assassination. Also, they believe in the class struggle, which 'Aflaq has disavowed. As time goes on it is this group, whether it wins or loses in Syria, that may come to dominate the party and displace those representing the 'Aflaq philosophy, although an honorific place may be reserved for him at the top of the party pantheon. Also, this wing of the party may well become hardly distinguishable from "national Communists," although it will continue outwardly to espouse the pan-Arab cause.

Much of the driving ideal behind the Ba'th has been lost in its struggle to gain and maintain power, yet those believing in 'Aflaq's views have been assiduously working to control the party. Two other problems face the traditional party leadership: the question of exactly how Arab unity is to be achieved, and how to maintain party discipline over the party's military element.

FOOTNOTES

1. 'Aflaq has denied ever joining the party and it is likely that if he had done so the fact would have been revealed with documentary evidence by the Communists. See: Patrick Seale, The Struggle for Syria (London, 1965), p. 150.

2. In fact, the first printed version of the party's constitution (1947) is entitled "The Arab Resurrection Party." In their early years 'Aflaq and Bitar emphasized socialism, but came to stress Arab nationalism in the late 1930's.

3. An English translation of the Constitution has appeared in Sylvia G. Haim (ed.), Arab Nationalism, an Anthology (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962), p. 233. In 'Aflaq's eyes unity, freedom and socialism are one and ^{none} ~~one~~ could be attained in a true sense without the other two.

4. Al-Musawwar, November 10, 1957, p. 32.

5. Ibid.

6. 'Aflaq has stated that it was while in Europe that he decided that the Syrian nationalist struggle was but a part of the Arab Nationalist struggle. Seale, op. cit., p. 149, and 'Aflaq, Al-Qaumiyya al-'Arabiyya wa Maqifuhu min as'l-Shayu'iyya (1944).

7. 'Aflaq, M. Ma'arakat al-Masir al-Wahid (Beirut, 1953), p. 19.

8. Middle East Forum, February 1958. Interview with 'Aflaq.

9. It is interesting to note that while 'Aflaq's ideas have been modified over the years, Bitar's have changed almost not at all. 'Aflaq has come to adjust more to the realities of political life, while Bitar retains more of the classical Socialist viewpoint.

10. Al Ba'th, March 28, 1950.

11. 'Aflaq, M. Fi Sabil al-Ba'th (Beirut, 1959), pp. 207-209.
12. Ibid, p. 213.
13. Ibid, p. 106.
14. Ibid, p. 108.
15. Al-Manar, June 30, 1957. This statement is from a Muslim Brotherhood paper quoting 'Aflaq.
16. Interview with 'Aflaq in Nova Makedonija, October 11, 1957.
17. Aflaq M. Fi Sabil al-Ba'th (1959), p. 97.
18. Ibid, p. 98.
19. This concept apparently stems from Rousseau's "perfectibility of man."
20. A party National Congress (the 2nd) in 1954 discussed this problem, but did not resolve it. It continued to plague the party until a Syrian Regional Congress in 1955 fully backed the 'Aflaq viewpoint. Akram al-Haurani was one of the strongest proponents of rapidly expanding the party.
21. Middle East Forum, op. cit.
22. Ma'rakat al-Masir al-Wahid, p. 27.
23. See: Gordon Torrey, Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945-1958 (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1964).
24. This tactical alliance between the Ba'th and Communists, forged in 1955, was aimed at opposing Syria's traditional ruling elements and is a good example of Ba'thist expediency in its struggle for its ultimate goals. 'Aflaq attacked the Communists in early 1957, but the move was made to end the cooperation.
25. The Syrian regime, which included a Ba'thist minister of health, had not yet given up hope that Iraq, which had joined the Baghdad Pact, would return to the Arab fold.

26. While in Egypt certain Ba'thist officers, including Amin al-Hafiz, Salah al-Jadid, and Muhammad 'Umran, formed a secret "Military Committee" which later played an influential role after the March 8, 1963 coup.

27. See: Monte Palmer, "The United Arab Republic: An Assessment of its Failure," Middle East Journal, XX, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), 50-67.

28. See: Gordon Torrey and John Devlin, "Arab Socialism," International Affairs, XIX, 1965, Number 1.

29. The party's National Command does not appear to have been involved in the plot.

30. Tahir Yahya and a number of other army officers were admitted to the party at this time.

31. For a detailed analysis of these discussions see: Malcolm Kerr, 1967 (New York, 1967), The Arab Cold War, 1958-1964 (London, 1965), pp. 58-101. The full Arabic text was published by the Egyptians in Mahadir Jalsat Mubahathat al-Wahda (Cairo, 1963).

32. This was a variant of a scheme for federal union between Syria and Egypt enunciated by the Ba'th National Command in May 1962. See: New York Times, April 11, 1963.

33. Al-Ba'th, October 28, 1963.

34. Ibid.

35. Sa'di, an opponent of the unity agreement with Nasir, was demoted to Minister of Guidance following the April agreement.

36. Ideology caused the Sa'di faction to believe in a community of interest with the Soviet Bloc, despite this faction's cool attitude toward the Soviet Union--an ideological problem still plaguing the party.

37. The moderates were reportedly supported by President 'Arif and 'Aflaq. However, this has been denied by 'Aflaq. See: Al-Mufarrir, and An-Nahar, November 14, 1963.

38. 'Arif arrested the members of the National Command sent from Damascus and they were not released until the National Guard was suppressed. Shabib and Jawad hailed the action by 'Arif against the National Guard when the party leaders were being held as hostages. For this they were expelled from the party on grounds of ideological deviation.

39. See: Al-Ahrar, February 25, 1966.

40. Al-Hayat, June 13, 1964.

41. In mid-1965, the NRCC was expanded to 75 members and included a greater proportion of civilians and some non-Ba'thists.

42. Damascus Radio, February 23, 1966.